



Jocassee Journal

Information and News about the Jocassee Gorges



DNR

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NEAR HERE ON NOV. 11, 1950
A USAF C-82 FLYING BOXCAR CRASHED
FOUR HEROES PERISHED
CAPT. JOHN M. STUCKRATH
1ST LT. ROBERT P. SCHMITT
STAFF SGT. EDWIN M. BLOOMER
STAFF SGT. WALTER O. LOTT
THANK YOU AND REST IN PEACE

A granite monument is now in place near the site of the Bully Mountain airplane crash, memorializing the four servicemen who gave their lives on Nov. 11, 1950.

Four servicemen who died in 1950 honored on Bully Mountain

American Legion posts, Clemson Air Force ROTC cadets take part in Sept. 16 Remembrance Service

For the first time in 63 years, four servicemen who lost their lives in a plane crash in the mountains of northern Pickens County in 1950 were honored with a Remembrance Service near the crash site. Three family members of one of the crash victims attended the service, traveling from Pensacola, Fla.

More than 70 people made the trek to Bully Mountain in the Franklin Gravely Wildlife Management Area of Jocassee Gorges to attend the Remembrance Service on Sept. 16 and to see a granite monument placed in honor of the fallen soldiers.

The Air Force C-82 twin engine "Flying Boxcar" took off from an airfield in Alabama and was headed to Greenville Air Force Base when it crashed Nov. 11, 1950. Killed in the crash were Capt. John M.

Stuckrath, 1st Lt. Robert P. Schmitt, Staff. Sgt. Edwin M. Bloomer and Staff Sgt. Walter O. Lott.

Two of Sgt. Lott's daughters, Anna Louise Agee and Gladys Odessa Wilson, made the trip to the Remembrance Service from Pensacola, Fla., along with Mrs. Wilson's son, Alton Riley. Mrs. Agee was 19 years old when her father was killed. She's now 83.

"It's something we've wanted to do for a long time," she said, "but we didn't know how to go about it. It's closure for Dad, because we've never had it."

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Director Alvin A. Taylor, who spoke at the Remembrance Service, said the honor afforded these four fallen airmen was long overdue.

"Because of the remote location of this crash, this event has been largely forgotten, and for 63 years there was no memorial to these brave men," Taylor said. "Now, a monument sits atop a hill,



Air Force C-82 "Flying Boxcar"

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Ben Palmer of Spartanburg, with the 2013 Upstate Master Naturalist class, looks out over the Jumping-Off Rock Overlook. The road to this popular vista is now open year-round. (Photo by Steven Faucette)

Jumping-Off Rock now open year-round in Jocassee Gorges

Popular overlook is one of the most breathtaking vistas in the Upstate

Jumping-Off-Rock, an iconic viewpoint above Lake Jocassee within the Jocassee Gorges in northern Pickens County, can now be accessed all year round. Horsepasture Road from US 178 to the popular overlook, and Camp Adger Road from US 178 to the Horse Mountain gate will be open for licensed vehicles. For safety, no ATV use will be allowed during the summer months.

The S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) decided to provide year-round access to the popular site, since it is one of the most recognized overlooks in the state.

"We have received many requests from the public to allow more access to Jumping Off Rock," said Mark Hall, DNR wildlife biologist and Jocassee Gorges project manager. "Opening these roads will allow easier access to the management area."


For years, vehicular access has been limited to the spring and fall seasons. The main roads within Jocassee have been operated on a seasonal schedule, for resource and safety reasons. The other seasonal roads on Jocassee will still be open for public access March 10 to May 20 and Sept. 15 to Jan. 15. ATV access will only be open on open roads during these time periods.

The Jumping-Off Rock area is one of the prime destinations on Jocassee. It has beautiful views and supports one of South Carolina's two pairs of nesting peregrine falcons. When the falcons assumed residency six years ago, a new overlook was created near Jumping-Off Rock to avoid

disturbance of the nesting pair of falcons. The overlook is one of the most remarkable vistas in the Upstate. The beautiful view of Lake Jocassee and the Blue Ridge Mountains is a must see. One rare feature at the vista is that few signs of human development are seen there.

National Geographic last year identified Jocassee Gorges as one the top 50 of "The World's Last Great Places." Several overlooks along the 10-mile ride on the Horsepasture Road to Jumping-Off Rock allow visitors to grasp a true sense of the vast extent of undisturbed landscape. The Horsepasture Road entrance is near the community of Rocky Bottom off US 178, about 8 miles north of the intersection of SC 11 and US 178 in northern Pickens County.

ATV's and licensed vehicles are allowed on the main roads on Jocassee Gorges from March 20 to May 10 and Sept. 15 to Jan 15. ATV's are not permitted to use the Horsepasture Road May 11 to Sept. 14 and Jan. 16 to March 19 in order to minimize safety issues, road damage and disturbance to wildlife. The use of 4-wheel drive and high-clearance vehicles is highly recommended for the long ride over steep hills and rough terrain.

Kiosks at the Jocassee entrances contain maps and a complete list of regulations pertaining to the property. Jocassee Gorges maps are available at many state parks along the S.C. 11 corridor and at the Clemson DNR office. The DNR website <http://www.dnr.sc.gov> has complete information as well. Contact the Clemson DNR office at (864) 654-1671 or Jocassee Field Office at (864) 878-9071 for more information. 

Monument to fallen servicemen placed near crash site

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above the crash site, so that all those who come after us will know about these servicemen. The presence of everyone at the Remembrance Service is testament to the respect that we have for these four airmen. They made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, paying the ultimate price. For that, we will be eternally grateful."

Forrest Sessions, DNR's project leader for the Dennis Wildlife Center in Bonneau, sang a beautiful rendition of "Taps" near the conclusion of the Remembrance Service. Dennis Chastain of Pickens County, who was lauded during the service for his tenacity in memorializing the fallen soldiers, led a field trip to the actual crash site after the ceremony.

Members of American Legion Post 11 of Pickens and Post 52 of Easley participated in the Remembrance Service, along with cadets from Clemson University's Air Force ROTC program. A number of local dignitaries attended the service, including State House members Sen. Larry Martin and Rep. Davey Hiott, both of Pickens, and Pat Welborn, Pickens County Clerk of Court.



Two of the daughters of Sgt. Lott, one of the servicemen who perished in the 1950 Bully Mountain crash, attended the Remembrance Service. Gladys Odessa Wilson (second from left) and her sister, Anna Louise Agee (fourth from left), admire the granite monument after the service. (Photo by Joyce Snyder)

DNR officials thanked a number of organizations and individuals for their contributions to the Remembrance Service, including Duke Energy, S.C. Forestry Commission, Keowee Vineyards Fire Department, Pickens County American Legion Posts 11 and 52, Clemson University Air Force ROTC, Richard Holcombe of Robinson Funeral Home, and Alexander Granite Co. of Easley. ❁

Gorges State Park in North Carolina opens new visitor center

Plunging waterfalls, rugged river gorges, sheer rock walls and one of the greatest concentrations of rare and unique species in the eastern United States are found within Gorges State Park. An elevation that rises 2,000 feet in only four miles, combined with rainfall in excess of 80 inches per year, creates a temperate rain forest and supports a collection of waterfalls.

Gorges State Park opened its new 7,100-square-foot Visitor Center on Oct. 12, 2012. The Center was designed and built to national green building standards. Additionally two large picnic shelters with restrooms, and maintenance

facilities were completed. The Visitor Center is home to the park offices, large exhibit hall, a 75-person auditorium, 40-person classroom, and large covered wrap around decks offering outstanding southern views of the escarpment and park. The center is currently under review for "GOLD" status by the national Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.

The Visitor Center is open daily (except Christmas Day) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For more information, call (828) 966-9099 or visit <http://www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/gorg/main.php>. ❁



The lovely view from the deck at the Gorges State Park Visitor Center looks over Lake Jocassee and back into South Carolina.



The Woodswomen who hiked the entire length of the 77-mile Foothills Trail in sections are (from left) Tonita Thompson, Carole Bozarth, Ellen Warren, Bobbie Wilhite and Crystal Lewis.

‘Woodswomen’ conquer the Foothills Trail

77-mile adventure takes friends through the heart of Jocassee Gorges

Seventy-seven miles, a bit at time, became a five month adventure for five Upstate Master Naturalists.

In 2010 Tonita Thompson began considering how to mark her 60th birthday in a memorable way. Having already experienced the beauty and serenity of some sections of the Foothills Trail, she invited four friends to hike the entire trail with her. So we – Carol Bozarth, Crystal Lewis, Ellen Warren and Bobbie Wilhite – along with Tonita became “The Woodswomen.” Our goal was to conquer the Foothills Trail in manageable day hikes. The Foothills Trail Guide, our necessary and constant companion, leads hikers from Table Rock to Oconee State Park. We did not always follow the sequence or direction in the Guidebook. Because our hiking abilities were varied, from beginner to seasoned, we began our journey with shorter moderate sections and over time progressed to longer and more strenuous ones.


When asked to describe our favorite section of the Foothills Trail, we found it impossible to narrow it down to one hike because with each new hike, we discovered a unique and diverse feature that made it special. Because we hiked from November to April, we experienced winter vistas

and emerging spring. From rushing whitewater, spectacular waterfalls, boulders the size of two-story buildings, rare and delicate flowers, moss covered logs, and impressive bridges, we took our time and not only admired, but studied the nature surrounding us.

When we started this adventure, we had no idea we would be in the heart of one of the “50 of the World’s Last GREAT Places” (National Geographic) – the Jocassee Gorges! The density of the forest, the lushness of the coves, the enormous size and number of ferns and wildflowers, the rivers, and the beauty of Lake Jocassee made this part of the Foothills Trail a spectacular experience.

By the end of our 77-mile adventure, we had formed a life bond. Each of us brought to the group our strengths and weaknesses and unique personalities that gelled together to help us accomplish our goal.

We appreciate all those who had the vision, who constructed and who now maintain the Foothills Trail. The Foothills Trail Guidebook, the DNR Jocassee Gorges Map, and the Foothills Trail Map were invaluable resources. Please visit www.foothillstrail.org and consider supporting this worthwhile organization.

When we entered the woods, we left the world behind... 



The gem in your backyard

Georgian says South Carolinians should get outside and visit their mountains!

By Dr. Walt Cook

I wonder how many South Carolinians are aware of the gem in their state. I'm from Georgia, but I really like your mountains more than our own. So, this little essay may help you decide to visit the Jocassee Gorges, if you haven't already.

I enjoy aphorisms – those witty, funny, concise, wise little sayings that provide advice to live by. I have several taped to the top of my computer desk; most are quotations by some sage philosopher type. With some minor substitutions of words, many can describe or illustrate my feelings toward the South Carolina mountains, and Jocassee Gorges in particular. I'll write the original and give the author, but I'll put my substitute word in parentheses.

The first one was on a cap I once had. I don't know the author, but it is my favorite motto: "If you're lucky enough to be in the woods (Jocassee Gorges), you're lucky enough." I enjoy being in nearly any woods, but Jocassee is my preference.

George Santayana, American philosopher, said "There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval," and there is no better place to enjoy the interval than in Jocassee Gorges, preferably near a waterfall, cliff, or quiet draw with only the sound of a little branch tumbling over the rocks, amid rhododendron in full bloom. You won't have any problem finding any of those attractions in the Jocassee Gorges.

I enjoyed the little cartoon called the "Family Circus." There was a typical family of five with the children about 1, 4, and 6. My favorite cartoon had the father holding the baby with the two older children admiring a sunset. The boy, about 6, wondered aloud, "How much would it cost to see a sunset (Jocassee Gorges) if God (DNR) decided to charge for it?" Let's hope DNR doesn't decide to charge admission or require a hiking license.

John Muir said, "In any walk with Nature (in Jocassee), one receives far more than he seeks." Some nature is simply stupendous, like the view from Jumping-Off Rock; but in getting to the Rock, one will receive some nature that is merely exquisite. Did you ever sit and study the blossom of the common (sometimes too common!) mountain laurel?

"I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life; I was given life that I might enjoy all things (Jocassee Gorges)." I couldn't find the author, but I have always attributed it to St. Francis of Assisi. But how true! If you are a South Carolinian reading this, make your life complete by visiting your mountains.

Finally, here is a quotation that apparently was written just for me. I have made trail design my personal recreation activity since I retired from teaching forestry in 1996. There isn't anything I'd rather do than flag a line for a new trail. And my favorite place to do it is – you guessed it – the Jocassee Gorges! Oh, yes, the quotation: Emerson said, "Do not go where the path leads; go where there is no path and leave a trail."

(Dr. Walt Cook is a retired forestry professor at the University of Georgia.) ❁



Congressman Joe Wilson (far right) recently took a hike in the Jocassee Gorges, on the Foothills Trail from Sassafras Mountain, the highest point in the state, to Chimneytop Gap, in northern Pickens County. He was accompanied on the walk by (from left) Tom Swaynham, senior wildlife biologist with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources; Heyward Douglass, executive director of the Foothills Trail Conference; and Brad Wyche, director of Upstate Forever. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)

2013 was year of the bla

Researchers complete field work to estimate mountain bear population

Researchers with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and Clemson University completed the field work on a project that will yield important new information on the population of black bears in the South Carolina mountains.

The project title is: "Estimating Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) population in the Mountains of South Carolina using DNA genetic analysis." The project leaders are Richard Morton and Tammy Wactor, wildlife biologists with the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the project cooperator is Dr. Joe Clark, of the University of Tennessee.

The objective of the study is to estimate the population of black bears in the Mountain Hunt Unit located in northern Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties using DNA analysis and to use this information to improve bear management in the Upstate. The collection of data took place June through August 2013.

Black bears have historically ranged throughout the northern portions of Oconee, Pickens, and Greenville counties in the mountain region of South Carolina. Limited studies have been conducted in the region to estimate population size. Over the past 10 years, the reports of bear sightings have greatly increased with many of those sightings outside the historic range. Black bear harvest numbers have also increased over the past 10 years. These trends could mean the bear population is growing and expanding out of its historical range. Estimated current bear population in the mountain region is between 900 to 1,200 bears based on older studies and extrapolated over time. In order for DNR to manage the



A hidden camera captures a young bear inside a barbed-wire enclosure sponsored by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources

black bear population in the Upstate through hunting and education, the state natural resources agency needs a better understanding of the population size and the potential of range expansion.

In June 2013, about 114 sampling sites were established across Oconee, Pickens, and Greenville counties based on specific criteria. Each sampling site consisted of two strands of barbed wire stretched around four trees. An attractant, raspberry essence and Krispy Kreme donuts, was placed within the enclosure in a manner to ensure the bear crossed the barbed wire to reach it, snagging some hair on the barbs. Sampling sites were checked, attractant replenished and hair samples collected every seven days for eight weeks.

About 350 hair samples are now being analyzed at a genetics lab in Canada, which will help produce a black bear population estimate for the Upstate study area. Results from the samples are expected to be complete in Summer 2014.

Cooperators in the black bear study included U.S. Forest Service, University of Tennessee, Clemson University, Naturaland Trust, S.C. State Park Service,



Three black bear siblings discovered in February in Oconee County in a box on the side of the road were released back into the South Carolina mountains this fall after spending the past eight months at a Tennessee bear rescue facility. (DNR photo by Greg Lucas)

Black bear in S.C. mountains



Wire enclosure, part of a black bear research project during Summer 2013.

Krispy Kreme and private landowners.

Sibling bear orphans released back into South Carolina mountains

Three black bear siblings discovered in February in Oconee County in a box on the side of the road were released back into the South Carolina mountains last week after spending the past eight months at a Tennessee bear rescue facility.

"This was absolutely the best outcome for these bears, for them to come back to South Carolina and be released into the wild," said Richard Morton, black bear biologist for the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. "Our best hope is never to hear from them again."

The sibling bear cubs came to Appalachian Bear Rescue in Townsend, Tenn., in March as 2.5-pound infant-orphans. By the time they were released back into South Carolina, they'd added about 100 pounds of weight, with a minimum of dependency on humans. The bears were released in a remote area of western South Carolina. The cubs were found in February by a volunteer fireman in South Carolina's Oconee County in a box on the side

of the road and were later transferred to the Tennessee bear rescue. In the ensuing months, the three bears were first fed by bottle, and then lived in an enclosure with natural, woodland features and almost no human contact.

To watch a YouTube video of the bears' release, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTMPjgr7nXw>

2013 bear harvest sets new record

The combination of a poor acorn crop and an overlapping bear and deer season result in 127 bears being killed by hunters during the two-week 2013 season in October, an all-time harvest record. The previous high was 92 in 2009.

Fall 2013 was one of the worst acorn crops seen in the South Carolina mountains. Bears left the mountains, moving low for alternate food sources, playing into the hands of still hunters sitting on private land. The six-day still hunt resulted in a record 70 bears, more than doubling the previous high of 31. This year also marked the first time that the still hunt harvest exceeded the dog hunt harvest.

Also contributing to the high harvest of black bears was there were more hunters in the woods in October, due to overlapping deer and bear seasons. Deer hunters may take a bear while deer hunting if they have bear tags.

Many of these hunters likely also benefited from a new regulation that allows for baiting of deer on private lands in the mountains. Although it's illegal to hunt bears over bait, it's likely that bait pulled bears into areas where they might not normally be.

The new state record 609-pound bear was killed by Easley's Heath Smith while deer hunting during the still hunt in Greenville County.

Oconee County led the bear harvest with 49 animals, followed by Pickens County with 45 and Greenville County with 33. 🍁



Keith Batson of Easley took this black bear in Pickens County during the record-breaking week of still hunting in October 2013.



Teachers, students and parents from Holly Springs Elementary School's Garden Club gathered for a work day to put in a Woodland Rain Garden to help control runoff at the northern Pickens County school.

Holly Springs Elementary is 'gardening for clean water'

School Garden Club students, teachers and parents work on rainwater solutions

By Cathy Reas Foster

It's pouring rain outside! Inside, students at Holly Springs Elementary School, located near the Jocassee Gorges, hurry to the windows to watch water drops fall and flow into the school rain gardens where the rainwater will renourish and replenish the soil and groundwater.

During rain showers, much of the water quickly washes from streets, parking lots, lawns and hard, clay soil directly into bodies of water or into ditches and storm drains which empty into our local waterways. This untreated water runoff is called stormwater and can unknowingly become polluted. The students, teachers and parents in the Holly Springs School Garden Club have prevented water pollution and flooding by using rain gardens and rain barrels in the school landscape, and have worked together to plan, install and maintain these rainwater solutions not only during past years but also into the "watery" future!


A rain garden is a shallow depression designed to collect and soak up water runoff from rooftops, parking lots, red clay soil or other impervious surfaces. The garden is planted with plants native to the region and provides erosion and flooding control, uptake of nutrients and chemicals, water infiltration and wildlife habitat. A rain barrel or container is designed to collect and store rainfall for reuse so that rainwater can be slowly released back into the soil, either through irrigation or watering.

The school garden club and community are "gardening for clean water." Preventing stormwater pollution during a rain storm is something everyone can do by planting



Mandalyn Ball (left) and Reynor Watson, students at Holly Springs Elementary School, show off their handiwork at their school's Woodland Rain Garden.

rain gardens, using rain barrels and containers to collect rainwater, recycling, composting yard debris, picking up litter and pet waste, keeping livestock and horses out of waterways, not feeding Canada geese, using fertilizer and pesticides carefully, and planting native vegetation on eroded areas and stream banks or lakeshores. The Jocassee Gorges offers a tremendous buffer for waterways in the Upstate. Keeping waterways clean and beautiful as they flow downhill from the Jocassee Gorges through the mountains and piedmont is important to recreation, wildlife, and drinking water supplies. And, best of all, clean water is refreshing and renourishing just like a rain shower in a garden!

(Cathy Reas Foster is a natural resources agent with the Pickens County Clemson Extension Service and is county coordinator with Pickens County Stormwater Partners.) 

A meadow...not just for bears

Skip Still Meadow, a piedmont prairie, taking shape at Clemson DNR office

By Cathy Foster and Dr. Bill Stringer

Walking through a forest of tall hardwood trees, a bear steps out of the shadows into the brilliant sunlight, like opening a curtain to daylight in a darkened room. The bear has traveled into a beautiful open space, with tall grasses and wildflowers swaying in the wind, alive with many animals scattering about...the bear has wandered into a landscape called a meadow.

Wildlife biologist Skip Still, a bear-ologist, naturalist, and official storyteller of unbelievable bear stories, is an advocate for these rare places called meadows. Skip, who retired from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) after more than 30 years of adventures in bear and natural resources management, has helped to preserve and manage wildlife habitats around the state. In honor of Skip and his work, a small demonstration meadow that will be used for educational purposes is being restored at the DNR office in Clemson and will be dedicated as the "Skip Still Meadow." Not only Skip, but also bears and other wildlife realize the importance of meadows, which are the small-scale versions of one of the Piedmont region's most significant and now missing landscapes, the piedmont prairie.

The piedmont prairie was once a prominent landscape and habitat in the upstate that provided many environmental and ecological benefits. The prairie is historically described by early explorers as "clear, rolling grassland" and requires grazing, fire or mowing to maintain open space. The soil in a prairie is rich with organics and nutrients. The plants are native, or indigenous, grasses and forbs, which means they established on their own and adapted to the local climate, geography and hydrology over many thousands of years. Forbs, derived from the Greek word "to graze," are herbaceous flowering plants. Just a few

native trees may grow in this landscape. The root systems of the native plants are deep, thereby stabilizing soil and preventing erosion. Rainwater or snowmelt in a prairie recharges groundwater instead of flowing over the land as water runoff. And, a prairie provides an amazing habitat for native wildlife, especially insects, birds, reptiles and mammals. Whether called a prairie or meadow, the benefits of this ecosystem are plentiful.

The Skip Still Meadow is being restored and managed with funding provided by the Duke Energy Foundation and the partnership of many organizations: DNR, Duke Energy, S.C. Native Plant Society, Clemson Extension Service, Clemson Experimental Forest, S.C. Botanical Garden and Pickens County Stormwater Partners, along with volunteers including Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists. These groups have removed exotic


invasive plants, prepared the soil and planted grasses including Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), bluestems (*Andropogon*), Eastern gamagrass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*), purpletop (*Tridens flavus*) and pink muhly (*Muhlenbergia capillaris*), and forbs including goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), Georgia aster (*Symphiotrichum georgianum*), wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*), blazing star (*Liatriis spicata*) and smooth coneflower (*Echinacea laevigata*). More days of planting, maintenance, and education are



Volunteers gathered together recently to work on the Skip Still Meadow at Clemson's DNR office, including the meadow's namesake, Skip Still, at right, manning the post-hole diggers!

forthcoming.

With these organizations dedicated to working together to preserve wildlife habitat and protect the environment, a piece of landscape history is being restored and managed in honor of a biologist who has made lasting "bear" tracks around the state. And, who knows, maybe a bear will one day be lucky enough to wander out of the nearby forest and into the Skip Still Meadow.

(Cathy Foster is a Clemson Extension agent in the Pickens office, and Dr. Bill Stringer is president of the Upstate Chapter of the S.C. Native Plant Society.) 



A teacher's group made up of middle and high school teachers from across the state enrolled in a week-long course to learn about the ecology of Bad Creek hydroelectric station and the surrounding Jocassee Gorges, sponsored by Clemson University and Duke Energy. (Photo by Allan Boggs)

Teachers learn about Jocassee Gorges ecology at workshop


By Patricia A. Whitener

It was a hot and humid July afternoon, and I was anxiously searching the sky for the requisite thunderstorm that was surely on its way over the mountain. I stood beside Howard's Creek, not far from the Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom, and caught glimpses of school-aged children all bright-eyed with expressions of curiosity and amazement. The first roll of thunder brought me back from my daydream, and I returned to the reality of a group of adults. They were looking at all the marvelous mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies they had just netted with the help of Clemson University aquatic entomologist, Dr. John Morse. The group was actually made up of middle and high school teachers from across the state that had enrolled in a week long course to learn about the ecology of Bad Creek hydroelectric station and the surrounding Jocassee Gorges.

Through the SC LIFE program, scientists in Clemson University's College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences and the College of Engineering and Science offer a wide selection of life science and natural history graduate courses specifically designed for in-service K-12 teachers and nonformal educators. Partners like the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and Duke Energy provide resources and funding for these courses. As a graduate student myself, earning a master's in wildlife and fisheries biology, I was intimidated to be the teaching assistant to a class of seasoned educators. What could I possibly have to share with these

professionals? The answer came on our first day. They arrived with open minds and cameras and were ready to explore one of my favorite places to bird watch, hike, kayak, and camp. Growing up in the Upstate has its advantages. I've spent many weekends in the "place of the lost one" and for many of the teachers, this was their first visit to Lake Jocassee.

As the week went on, we were treated to an extensive tour of the Bad Creek powerhouse, and I marveled at the feat of engineering that goes into flipping on a light switch. I watched teachers eating blackberries and learning about other wildlife food sources from Duke Energy's Allan Boggs. I saw them warily touch a little brown water snake that retired Duke Energy biologist John Garton caught from the vernal pond at the outdoor classroom. I celebrated the discovery of raccoon tracks and bear hair with retired DNR biologist, Skip Still and learned a bit more of the history of Jocassee Gorges from Greg Lucas. In this week that went by so quickly, we each took turns being teacher and student. I can only hope that they each found something in this magical place that transfers to their classrooms and brings them back to share the Bad Creek Outdoor Classroom with their students. In them I saw the faces of the young people they impact and perhaps a remembering of why it was they had become teachers in the first place. Jocassee Gorges has this effect, refreshing both mind and spirit. What a valuable resource to share with South Carolina's teachers. Count me in for next year!

(Patricia A. Whitener recently graduated from Clemson University with a master's degree in wildlife and fisheries biology.) 

Lake Jocassee kayaking fatality examined

March 16 kayaking death reviewed
by Coast Guard Auxiliary officer

By James J. Rudy

At about 3:15 p.m. on March 16, 2013, a 25-year-old Clemson graduate student and his wife rented a kayak from a facility near Lake Jocassee. The body of the student was found floating early the next morning, March 17, near one of the paddles from the capsized kayak.

Let's review the circumstances of this unfortunate accident so that others may learn and not repeat some of the errors in judgment.

According to Ray Lewis, the S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) investigating officer, the forecast winds in the area were from the west-southwest at 15 mph gusting to 30 mph, and the lake surface water temperature was in the mid-50s. I often fish at Lake Jocassee in my 17-foot Starcraft Deep V fishing boat, which has an 86-inch beam. I always check the weather before leaving my home, and I would not have traveled to the lake based on those forecast winds. In my opinion it would have been too risky and dangerous for me to try to fish under those weather conditions.

The couple were inexperienced kayakers, and they each wore type III life jackets. She could swim. He could not. The husband wore jeans and a T-shirt. The couple ventured out into the cove off the boat ramps at Devils Fork State Park. They noted smoke from a controlled burn in the Horsepasture arm of the lake and decided to paddle in that direction. As they exited the cove into "big water," the waves were much higher than in the protected cove. The wind and waves increased even more so the couple tried to turn back into the wind and return to the protected cove. Soon thereafter, at about 4:30 p.m., the kayak capsized and both were thrown out. The kayak drifted away in the high winds. The husband floundered, probably panicking, and apparently could not keep his head up out of the water. The wife swam downwind and exited the water about an hour later in a remote area near Bootleg Ramp. She frantically attempted to attract attention but there were no other boaters in the area.

Shortly after 6 p.m., employees of the rental facility came to the boat ramp looking for their kayak which was to be expected back by then. Unable to spot the kayakers anywhere in the cove, they decided to motor out in a pontoon boat to search for the couple. Sometime later they found the wife near Bootleg Ramp. They then dialed 911, and Oconee County rescue officials and DNR officers started a search that began about dark. Six or seven boats searched without result until about 3 a.m. Searchers returned at first light on March 17 and soon recovered the body in the middle of the lake with one of the paddles nearby. The kayak and the other paddle were found along the shore. Results of the autopsy confirmed that the fatality was caused by drowning.

Some important points to note:

1. Do not kayak on large bodies of water under windy conditions.
2. Inexperienced kayakers should never kayak alone. Even experienced kayakers should have an accompanying kayaker.
3. Do not kayak in waters when other boaters are not on the water.
4. Unless you are in calm waters, always wear a type I life jacket. This type of jacket is buoyant about the head and shoulders and should you fall overboard it will keep your head up out of the water. It also is designed to turn most unconscious wearers to a face-up position. (Also, always ensure your life jacket fits properly and is in good serviceable condition).
5. Take caution and exercise careful consideration when boating in the winter months. For example, if are wearing a type I life jacket and are thrown into water with temperatures from 50 to 60 degrees you would suffer exhaustion or unconsciousness in one to two hours and have an expected time of survival of one to six hours. Do not panic! Stay calm, retrieve flotsam from the vessel if possible, such as an oar, seat pad, or anything that will help you float, and swim as much with the current as possible to reach land.
6. Take a Paddle Smart course offered by either the Golden Corners Power Squadron or our Flotilla 25 of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Of South Carolina's three Upstate lakes, Jocassee, Keowee and Hartwell, Jocassee has the most wind and they are often unexpectedly strong. Because Jocassee sits in the mountains and is surrounded by large steep valleys, strong winds often rush down the slopes onto the lake. Note that area forecast winds are often much stronger at Lake Jocassee than forecast.

According to the annual statistics for recreational boating accidents and fatalities nationwide, as compiled by the U.S. Coast Guard, only open power motor boats were involved in more fatalities than kayaks and canoes. If you would like to attend a future About Boating Safely or the Paddle Smart course, contact me at (864) 972-2085 or jimrudy@bellsouth.net. The Clemson DNR office also teaches safe boating classes and offers boating safety classes online and via DVD. Contact the Clemson DNR office at (864) 654-1671 for more information.

Editor's note: Charlie Michael, owner of Jocassee Outdoor Center, was charged by DNR on March 17 with neglecting the duties of a boat livery as to safety equipment. He pleaded no contest Dec. 18 and paid a \$250 fine.

(James J. Rudy is public affairs officer for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary's Flotilla 25) 



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the Jocassee Gorges

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Camping ban remains in effect at Eastatoe Creek Heritage Preserve in Jocassee Gorges

The camping ban at popular Eastatoe Creek Heritage Preserve in northern Pickens County remains in effect because of the risk of dead and dying hemlock trees on the property.

A group disregarded the camping ban earlier this year and illegally camped on the preserve, and one of the campers was seriously injured by a falling tree.

"Because so many hemlock trees have died due to hemlock woolly adelgids, it's just too dangerous to let people camp in the preserve," said Mary Bunch, S.C. Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wildlife biologist and heritage preserve manager. "We hope visitors who use the preserve will respect the camping ban, because it is in place for their safety."

In addition to camping being closed on Eastatoe Creek Heritage Preserve, campfires are also prohibited due

to the large number of dead trees. Large signs prominently placed in the preserve remind visitors that camping and campfires are not allowed there.



Visit www.dnr.sc.gov/sassafrasmountain.html to help fund an observation tower atop Sassafras Mountain.

Eastatoe Creek Heritage Preserve is owned and managed by DNR and covers 374 acres in Pickens County. This steep mountain gorge features a trout stream, dramatic rock cliffs and rare ferns that are maintained by the creek's moist spray. The 2.7-mile trail into the preserve, a spur of the 77-mile Foothills Trail (www.foothillstrail.org), is popular with naturalists and local hiking groups. For more information on the preserve, visit https://www.dnr.sc.gov/mlands/managedland?p_id=10.

In 2012, the Jocassee Gorges in Pickens and Oconee counties was named one of "50 of the World's Last Great Places—Destinations of a Lifetime" in a special edition of National Geographic magazine. 